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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000009

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SAYID AL SHUHADA SUPPORT BADR'S NINE PROVINCE REGION

REF: A) 07 BASRAH 104 B) 07 BASRAH 116

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CLASSIFIED BY: Won Lee, A/Director, U.S. Regional Embassy  
Office, Basrah, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: Regional Embassy Officers met with representatives of Sayid al-Shuhada (SAS, aka Lord of the Martyrs) January 28. SAS complained about the U.S. arrest of Rasheed Majeed al-Sari, the editor of SAS newspaper Al-Fateh, and requested his release. They also reviewed their political platform, told us that they supported early elections, expected to gain several seats in the Provincial Council, and supported the Badr/Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) proposal to form a nine-province region. They also asked for U.S. support in Basrah's economic development. End Summary.

SAS COMPLAINS ABOUT NEWSPAPER EDITOR'S ARREST  
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12. (S/NF) SAS Deputy Secretary General Hilal Naiem Dikhan was accompanied by Political Director and Provincial Council (PC) member Qasim Al-Fayad (aka Qasim Mohammad Badir), and Drs. Ahmad Jasim, Nasser Abd al-Sijad al-Musawi, and Hussein al-Kabi (political section). Hilal began by passing us a letter in both Arabic and English protesting America's detention of Rasheed Majeed al-Sarai on January 17 in Baghdad. Hilal said that Sarai was the chief editor of SAS's newspaper, Al-Fateh, published in Baghdad and distributed throughout Iraq. Hilal said that Sarai was a legitimate member of the Press Union, arresting him violated the democratic principle of freedom of speech, and demanded his release. We told Hilal we were unaware of the arrest and would ask Embassy Baghdad for Sarai's status. (Comment: U.S. forces captured Rashid Majid Muhammad al-Sarraji (aka Abu Narjis) on January 16 in Baghdad. The Al-Fateh newspaper uses anti-CF rhetoric, and while detained, Sarai admitted the paper was financed by Iran. We have scanned the letter to Embassy Baghdad. End Comment.)

POLITICAL PLATFORM  
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13. (S/NF) SAS described for us their political beliefs at our last meeting (Ref B), but reviewed them once more at our request as follows: peace, prosperity and democracy for all Iraqis who suffered under the previous regime; supporting peace

negotiations with their neighbors; support for the security forces and the law; educating Iraqis to support the Iraqi Constitution; repudiating of terrorism; developing relationships with the international community, especially their neighbors, based on mutual benefit and non-interference; the renunciation of nuclear and chemical weapons; supporting the role in society; and supporting an effective government. Qasim promised to provide us with a written description at our next meeting.

#### EARLY ELECTIONS & NINE PROVINCE REGION

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¶4. (S/NF) Hilal stressed the need for early elections to bring political change to Basrah. When asked how SAS might fare, Hilal said they planned to campaign hard, expected to do well and win at least five seats on the PC. He reasoned that Basrawis are upset with the current power-holding parties and would vote for a change in the status quo. He predicted that the Office of the Martyr Sadr, despite trying to improve their image, would not do as well as some predicted because Jaysh al-Mahdi is still blamed for Basrah's problems. Fayad added that SAS only got one seat on the PC through the closed-list system by joining the Badr-led Basrah Islamic List. Had they ran independently, they might have done better and they were contemplating doing so for the next election. They also said an open-list was more democratic and preferable to a closed-list.

¶5. (S/NF) SAS supports the Badr/Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) proposal to form a southern region of nine provinces, with Basrah as the capital. Hilal said SAS supported the idea because a separate southern region could emulate the success of the UAE. He also said that the Gulf States should divide into regions, not because it would be good for them, but because it would prevent them from negatively interfering in Basrah's affairs. (Comment: SAS's support for Badr/ISCI plan is expected given the close coordination between the two parties. Sources and reporting indicate that SAS often take orders from Badr.)

BASRAH NEEDS RECONSTRUCTION FROM THE U.S.

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¶6. (S/NF) SAS representatives stressed the need for Basrah's economic development and asked us to bring more investors here. They also complained that the USG was not doing reconstruction projects here. After we explained that the British-led PRT was primarily funded by the U.S. and the work of the Corps of Engineers, they expressed disappointment that we did not claim any credit for what we did. We retorted that we had to keep a low profile or some militias would target CF-led projects. Not willing to concede the point, Hilal said those groups should then be confronted. Basrah's security was slightly better since the arrival of Basrah Operations Commander LTG Mohan Hafith Fahad and Police Chief MG Jalil Khalaf Shuwayl, but Hilal said neither was forceful enough in dealing with JAM.

#### COMMENT

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¶7. (S/NF) SAS may be trying to improve their image to do better in possible elections this year. Our conversation made it clear they are already preparing an elections campaign. They have co-opted some professors to portray a more educated party, claim to have disavowed their militant activities, stressed their party's legitimacy, and their engagement with us is likely an attempt to reinforce their facade of legitimacy. Hilal even asked for a meeting with Ambassador Crocker during our discussion, though promising to keep the REO as their central contact.

¶8. (S/NF) Hilal also told us that SAS has a weak relationship with MND-SE and has only met with them a couple of times since ¶2003. We offered to broker introductions, but Hilal refused stating the British failed in Basrah and SAS preferred to work with the USG.

